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The Challenge to Foundations and Leadership: Critical Discourse, Hegemony, and the Power of Traditions

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This paper is a representational conversation between the authors—a social foundations professor and a leadership professor—regarding a leadership program in which both faculty members teach. Tensions between social foundations and leadership have historically been characterized by different interpretations (or narratives) of scholarship, student roles, and resulting course content. Where foundations courses often explore interpretive—sometimes unanswerable—theoretical questions, leadership courses, in their traditional variety, explore answerable, practical questions. This "conversation" intends to show how even when disparate historical contexts are mediated, shared ideas between social foundations and leadership faculty still face challenges. The challenges asserted here are, in part, due to traditions within the school spheres from which leadership students come and a resulting hegemony as a byproduct of those spheres. To be clear, when foundations and leadership faculty share a critical vision for school leadership, where critical vision means problematizing and challenging assumptions, power structures, and what Maxine Greene calls the "givens" of school life,[1] it does not mean that students make connections between their lives and the ideas entailed in a critical vision for school life. We argue, in fact, that two professors sharing a critical vision are not enough to significantly alter students whose view of the leadership program is less about graduate study than it is about administrative training. Still, as this "conversation" intends to reveal, significant changes in a few classes within the leadership program have the power to contest long-held

assumptions and represent a direction we believe is necessary to shift schools from corporate culture training sites to democratic public spheres.

Giroux calls the general problem identified here "a crisis in leadership."[2] The crisis is really one characterized by management training and administration over leadership for democratic engagement. We argue in favor of leadership for democratic engagement at the same time we highlight some of the practical issues of leadership "preparation" that stand in the way of having educational leaders heading up democratic public spheres (schools). The notions "democratic engagement" and "democratic public spheres" are neither problem-free nor easily defined, but are arguably part of the larger claim: that good leadership is not about de-skilling "how-to-do" lists but, rather, the complexities of leadership mirror the complexities of democratic notions of engagement *qua* schools as public spheres. Making such notions problematic through courses in leadership programs requires re-thinking the role of leadership training, the function of foundations of education courses, and—at the same time—offers potential for alternative learning that impels school change. Accordingly, and in the final analysis, broad coalitions of social foundations and leadership faculty may offer the best hope for an integrated, defensible, and workable program resulting in leaders instead of managers.[3]

Boyles

The course I teach for the leadership program is titled "Curriculum Foundations for the Educational Leader." The title comes from the state department, i.e., it conforms to one of the areas the Professional Standards Commission requires for leadership certification in the state of Georgia. Using Kliebard's *Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* as the foundational text for the course,[4] students are exposed to historical considerations that most students have never studied before. Importantly, the cycles of history and the small changes in curriculum evidenced over time are not lost on the students. They realize that even though, in Kliebard's terms, the social efficiency advocates and humanists have largely won the struggle for control over U.S. curriculum, many questions remain. Questions are considered vital in the course—what kinds of questions to ask, when to ask them (when *not* to ask them), and to whom the questions should be posed—all are general lenses through which Kliebard's history of curriculum is utilized. Questioning, however, is not, by students' own admission, something they do much of in their roles as teachers. They find themselves, instead, on the receiving end of dictate after dictate such that questioning need never occur. Why should

it? As they already sensed but did not know in epistemologically defensible ways, the dictates they repeatedly received were dealt with in a way reminiscent of Kliebard's history: "this, too, shall pass."

Given this point, students are asked whether they think their non-questioning dispositions (self proclaimed) inhibit their leadership potential. General questions about questioning give way to more targeted questions for consideration: What will they do to make the drudgery of a "this, too shall pass" attitude go away? What power do they, as future leaders, actually have to make the changes they identify as important? What hegemony lurks in their schools that will preclude the very changes they often propose by the end of the course and the end of the program? What constitutes democratic engagement? Can schools be democratic public spheres or are Giroux, Apple, Carlson, etc., simply waxing poetic over a strange and mythological post-modern "ideal"?[5] What is the purpose of schooling? Why?

Marrying history and philosophy of education with curriculum, then, leaves many of the students with headaches, but they also often (though not always) pause and reflect in the very ways Giroux, Sehr, Apple, et al., would have to admire. That is, when considering the history of curriculum and the philosophical questions that go along with that history, the future leaders see themselves asking questions about the present, especially given the cyclical nature of the history of curriculum. They are concerned about social efficiency but find themselves operating in what Freire calls "semi-transitive consciousness." They are able to see and identify problems, in other words, but are unable to act in ways that confront the very problems they are able to identify.[6] The point is to achieve critical transitivity: seeing and identifying problems and acting on those problems in ways that attempt to solve them.

A different kind of question occurs, however. Is the leadership program intending its graduates to be critically transitive? Is the role of the program to develop questioning leaders? Is the content of other course work directed toward questions of democratic engagement, civic change, critical citizenship, and the like, or is the content traditional insofar as it expects students to replicate the "real world" of school management? My concern is, and has been, that at least some of the course work in the leadership program has not encouraged questioning and is not directed toward reconstructing schools as democratic public spheres. Some course work, in fact, reinforces the hegemony of traditional power relations and elevates such things as PowerPoint presentations to the level of universal requirement for "good" leadership. In Giroux's terms,

> . . . curriculum must be understood as representative of underlying interests that structure how a particular story is told through the organization of knowledge, social relations, values, and forms of assessment. In short, curriculum itself represents a narrative or voice, one that is multilayered and often contradictory but also situated within relations of power that more often than not favor white, middle-class, English-speaking students. What this . . . suggests for administrators and teachers is that curriculum must be seen in the most fundamental sense as a battleground over whose forms of knowledge, history, visions, language, culture, and authority will prevail as a legitimate object of learning.[7]

What I wish to point out by the use of Giroux's quote is just how applicable the critique of curriculum is to both the study of curriculum in the leadership program *and* how applicable the critique is to the leadership program itself. Perhaps my colleague disagrees. Let me pause at this point so he can offer his ideas.

Davis

Deron ended with a call for a critique of leadership preparation programs. I agree that this is necessary and would also suggest an additional step: a call for a critique of how we construct leadership in public schools. I further suggest, in tacit agreement with Deron, that issues of curriculum are fundamental to conceptions of leadership. I would further add that curriculum be viewed in two contexts: the study of issues of curriculum in public schools as part of leadership preparation; and, the reflection and reconsideration of the type of curriculum needed to prepare school leaders. Specifically, how might we develop an entire program that encourages questioning and is directed toward reconstructing schools as democratic public spheres?

Preparation of school leaders in American universities has historically been driven by constructs of leadership closely aligned with constructs of management and administration. Spencer Maxcy suggests that in this case "leadership" becomes an adjunct to policy:

> . . . it is seen as a way to name certain attitudes aimed at changing educational practice. Leadership training seminars seek to radically alter the values and beliefs of educational administrators in terms of enthusiasm, dedication, responsibility, organizations, and so forth so that key transformations may be made in the direction of a school or educational program. Little is done in such efforts to explore the often conflicting theories and meanings of "leadership" or the logical bearings alternative conceptions of leading may have upon day-to-day affairs of schooling.[8]

Nonetheless, in addition to this tradition, driven by principles of positivism, bureaucratic processes, and scientific management, a different construct of leadership has developed and gained legitimacy. This construct is characterized by ideas of professionalism, reflective practice, shared decision-making, collegiality, democratic culture, and schools as learning organizations.[9]

The result of these two historical trends in scholarship on school leadership is a curriculum and knowledge base for the preparation of school leaders that is inherently contradictory and paradoxical. Students must mediate these dichotomies and often, mistakenly I believe, articulate them as differences between theory and practice. This thinking is understandable because whenever future leaders are trained to engage in specific practices, either actions that increase control or increase autonomy, there are forces of resistance within their cultural/social/political work environments.

There are many ways in which a professor might facilitate the construction of meaning regarding the unavoidable tensions of school leadership. One method I use is to explore with students the issues resulting from both the provision of educational resources through representative taxation and the need and effort to develop public school teaching as a profession. A simplified presentation of this problem is that taxpayers provide the monetary resources for public schools, and through our representative democratic system, seek to exercise control of the use of those funds. In addition, there is a broad public expectation that funding is allocated for schools to provide certain services. The controls and expectations are publicly maintained through all levels and branches of government; yet, the primary public agents are members of elected school boards. As the agency of control, school boards make policy and appoint superintendents, who then appoint individual central office personnel and school principals. This is, in many respects, a traditional, hierarchical, top-down, bureaucratic structure. The structure is such that teachers are near the bottom of this bureaucratic structure in public education. Nonetheless, it is widely recognized, that problem solving and improvement is facilitated by the development of reflective professional practice.[10] In the case of teachers, along with the independent and necessary knowledge base and the performance of a vital social and economic function that teaching already has, a profession requires individual practitioners to have control of their own practice.[11]

The previous example supports Deron's assertion that "the complexities of leadership mirror the complexities of democratic notions of engagement *qua* schools as public spheres." Thus, I would argue that a

leadership preparation program that only presented "truths" and "how to knowledge" about leading schools would not only leave graduates ill prepared to deal with the complexities of the leadership role, but also do more harm than good by encouraging them that they are, through their administrative and management function, the ones responsible for knowing the problem, knowing the best solution, and implementing the solution in the best manner. Given the problematic nature of such knowledge, the end result is leaders with the power of office pretending they know what and pretending they know how. Such school leaders might be seen as constructing themselves as efficient managers and problem solving administrators. Again, this might be sufficient if human organizations were not complex. Milan Kundera speaks of the complexity of modern life and suggests that the novel reveals previously hidden complexity that is often unobserved:

> The novel's spirit is the spirit of complexity. Every novel says to the reader: "Things are not as simple as you think." That is the novel's eternal truth, but it grows steadily harder to hear amid the din of easy, quick answers that come faster than the question and block it off.[12]

It seems to me that in education it is also difficult to hear among the din of easy, quick answers, and that also in education the answers too frequently block off the questions. Therefore, in addition to management and administrative training, it is important that the curriculum used to prepare school leaders include the development of intellectual leaders who engage in the critical reflection necessary to facilitate schools as democratic public spheres. This effort, along with inquiry into the history and issues of curriculum, also requires a strong foundations component. Students must be exposed to, and struggle with, unanswerable, theoretical questions about both the role of public education in society and the meaning of knowledge.

I embed the study of foundations of education in an introductory course I teach that is required for school leadership certification in Georgia on leadership in educational organizations. Most of the students taking this course are new to graduate studies and have the reasonable expectation that they will be taught knowledge of how to effectively run schools. I begin each course telling the students that if I knew the answers to this question that I would surely tell them. I use the metaphor of constructing a building and tell them that an architect designing a building has many limitations (location, cost, purpose of the building, etc), options (style, construction techniques, building materials), and given sets of knowledge (principles of engineering and design) that influence the final structure constructed. The result of this is that our

cities are filled with a wide variety of buildings with thousands of different variations in form and function.

I suggest to the students that the objective of the course is for them to construct themselves as school leaders. To accomplish this objective, the course is designed to build on their existing knowledge and experience in schools through learning, reflection and critique of the limitations, options, and knowledge of school leadership. Students are given the opportunity to construct themselves as school leaders in ways that are uniquely their own. As part of this process, I present an alternative version of the issue of theory and practice. Rather than looking at theory and practice as two ways of knowing the same thing that by necessity must be mutually exclusive, I present them as single ways of knowing about two different things. I use a reading from Machiavelli in which he talks about the difference between the way things ought to be and the way things are.[13] Thus, theory is thinking and reflecting on the way things ought to be, and practice is the way things actually are. Theory, in this case, being limited by necessary reliance on a set of assumptions that simplify the complexities of human behavior described by Kundera. Regardless of the complexity of school cultures, leaders must practice their profession in school organizations. Perhaps Deron might discuss how the inclusion of foundations throughout a leadership preparation curriculum might better prepare school leaders for practice?

Boyles

Imagine the student leaving Doug's introductory class. I have. We even share some of the same students in the courses we are including in our discussion here, so imagining gives way to remembering. The student walks from Doug's class to mine in a state of bemused confusion. As though someone just told them that the universe no longer revolves around Earth, many of the students with which this paper deals are finally, in my estimation, doing what graduate programs in leadership, in part, are supposed to do: raise questions and contest long-held assumptions—not only about the content of their courses, but the processes and expectations within them. Doug quite rightly points out that the students enter his (our) classes with expectations for answers. It's the modern sophist's way. But one point should not be lost here: the students are not to blame, *per se*. They are doing what has been expected of them through much of their formal schooling: Get in, get the answers, get an "A," get out, get a job or get a raise, and get on with life.

Historically, leadership courses in our department were renown for their ease: sit through "war stories," write a paper that may not be

commented on or read, take extra-long breaks, do group-work of the worst kind (i.e., chat rather than problem-solve) . . . the list goes on. The point, as Doug highlights, is that the schemata, the model, and the form of the classroom expectations for the leadership students reified the sophistic stance with which the students entered the program. Said differently, courses that use texts like Bob Boylan's *Get Everyone in Your Boat Rowing in the Same Direction* and Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*[14] as "paradigms" to achieve "synergy" and "excellence" in "leadership," are still engaged in the misguided search that Dewey called the quest for certainty.[15] As long as one can reduce complex issues to bullet points on a PowerPoint presentation, one "achieves." Yet, the achievement—and there is achievement here—is of a different kind. What is achieved is hegemony. Students willingly participate in their own oppression when they demand easier grading requirements, less reading, less difficult reading, and more "practical" case scenarios that often get them into coffee-klatch groups rather than problem-solving ones.

To better engage students such that they will be better leaders means focusing on the distinction Doug pointed out before: the way things are and the way things ought to be. Students usually understand this to be, in non-philosophical terms, the difference between the real and the ideal. The meta-narrative of the "real world" has been so ingrained as part of the hegemony to which I refer that unless practical applications are made to the pre-existing (and often impervious) "real world" they think they know, students are often befuddled by questions that investigate the veracity of their claims about what they call the "real world." I'm reminded here of a Giroux essay in which he was talking about his university students and their roles and how they had trouble critiquing and contesting assumptions. He wrote:

> Most of our students are very comfortable with defining themselves as technicians and clerks. For them to be all of a sudden exposed to a line of critical thinking that both calls their own experience into question and at the same time raises fundamental questions about what teaching [leadership] should be and what social purposes it might serve is very hard for them. They don't have a frame of reference or a vocabulary with which to articulate the centrality of what they do. They are caught up in market logic and bureaucratic jargon.[16]

Our students, perhaps most students, suffer the same malady. So to return to Doug's challenge, how might foundations of education courses aid leadership students in developing the kind of critique to which Giroux refers? Go back to the real versus ideal distinction students typically draw.

In older and more traditional philosophy, system-building was the

prevalent goal. Metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, teleology, cosmology, etc., cohered. They were constitutive of what one would claim to be "a philosophy." Accordingly, the questions about what is and what ought to be were not disjunctive. They were conjoint propositions. Differently, but related, Dewey's notion of means/ends (where the two are not separable, but represent product and process at the same time) collapses the kind of dualism that pervades much of the "real/ideal" distinction students make about the world in which they find themselves. Max Horkheimer argued similarly in *Eclipse of Reason* that the nature of truth cannot be discovered through means that ignore questions of ends.[17] Collapsing dualisms, like theory/practice, is often a challenge faced by foundations faculty, but I wonder if it is a quandary most leadership faculty face or spend much time considering?

Perhaps all of these issues come down to time. Leadership students (and leadership faculty) have inordinately prescribed course work. State governing bodies require it, faculties implement it, students endure it, and life goes on. Yet time—to take classes, to think, to *add* to course requirements—is one feature that is sorely lacking in leadership (and other) programs and evidently will only get worse. With the demographic shift wherein leaders are and will be increasingly in high demand, the social efficiency contingent in legislatures, provosts offices, and even in leadership programs themselves are producing "alternative" means by which "leaders" will be "produced." Like the four-week "train to be a teacher" program in Georgia, there is an alternative certification program for leaders, led not by faculty such as Doug, but by those interested in reducing (rather than infusing) the kinds of critical analyses and thinking that Doug advocates and that foundations courses generally intend. What appears to be championed is ease, efficiency, convenience, simplicity, practicality, and the like.

I wish to go to great lengths here to state the obvious: all leadership programs are not to be confused with the problem areas argued here and, perhaps even more importantly, foundations of education courses do not, by virtue of their existence, mean that what goes on in them achieves the kind of criticality for which Doug and I have been arguing. There are programs, Miami University in Ohio comes to mind among them, that strive for an integration of what Doug and I have been characterizing as "leadership" and "foundations of education."[18] That said, hegemony resides in the academy, too. We must be ever-mindful of ways to infuse criticality into leadership courses and course offerings (and I would argue foundations of education courses, as well) and resist the "realities" that force faculty into accepting "alternative programs" and reduced participation in program offerings. Doug, in this sense, needs "reinforce-

ments" and support. Without support, criticality risks being marginalized in favor of hyper-practical "how-to" prescriptions. Hegemony only gets reified this way, not challenged. Accordingly, the power of traditions petrifies into what Dewey called the "dead wood of the past" and supports a status quo unwilling to change in substantive meaningful ways.

Notes

[1] Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988).

[2] Henry A. Giroux, "Educational Leadership and School Adminstrators: Rethinking the Meaning of Democratic Public Cultures," in T.A. Mulkeen, et al., *Democratic Leadership: The Changing Context of Administrative Preparation* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1994): 31-47.

[3] Because the format of this paper is conversational, first person will be used to demarcate stances and experiences.

[4] Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[5] See Dennis Carlson, *Teachers and Crisis: Urban School Reform and Teachers' Work Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Linda M. McNeil, *Contradictions of Control: School Structure and School Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Daniel P. Liston and Kenneth M. Zeichner, *Teacher Education and the Social Conditions of Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, *Education Still Under Seige* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1993); Michael W. Apple, *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and David T. Sehr, *Education for Public Democracy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

[6] See Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury, 1973).

[7] Giroux, 42.

[8] Spencer Maxcy, *Educational Leadership: A Critical Pragmatic Perspective* (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1991), 75.

[9] See Michael Fullan, *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform* (New York: Falmer Press, 1993); Christopher Hodgkinson, *Educational Leadership: The Moral Art* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991); Thomas Sergiovanni, *Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992); Richard Wallace, *From Vision to Practice: The Art of Educational Leadership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 1996); and Thomas Mulkeen, Nelda Cambron-McCabe, Bruce Anderson (Eds.), *Democratic Leadership: The Changing Context of Administrative Preparation* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1994).

[10] Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

[11] See, for example, Joseph Newman, *America's Teachers* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2002), 10-12; and Ann Bradley, "The Not-Quite Profession," *Education Week* (15 September 1999).

[12] Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 18.

[13] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952).

[14] See Bob Boylan, *Get Everyone in Your Boat Rowing in the Same Direction: 5 Leadership Principles to Follow So Others Will Follow You* (Holbrook, MA: Adams Media, 1995) and Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York: Fireside, 1990).

[15] John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1929).

[16] Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 16. Giroux is referenced as much as he is in this paper primarily because the students Doug teaches have Giroux as a required reading assignment. It apparently is one that underscores the concerns Giroux expresses in the last quote, as students find the reading and the conceptual analysis difficult.

[17] Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 73.

[18] See, for example, Nelda H. Cambron-McCabe and William Foster, "A Paradigm Shift: Implications for the Preparation of School Leaders," in Thomas A. Mulkeen, et al., eds. *Democratic Leadership: The Changing Context of Administrative Preparation* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1994).

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Dialogue as Research

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Introduction

Dialogue in education has been used and promoted for many years. Well known examples include the teachings of Socrates, Plato, Augustine, Hume, and Buber. This use of dialogue in education has become more prevalent in the last twenty years, primarily through the work of Paulo Freire. Freire and other educators such as Matthew Lipman (1991), Ira Shor (1992), Myles Horton (1990), Nicholas Burbules (1993), Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon (1991), and Harvey B. Sarles (1993) have promoted dialogue as a mode of teaching. Others have primarily used it as a mode of inquiry (Guba 1990; Green & Chandler 1990) or as an "examination for the purpose of discovering information or examining particular phenomena" (Green & Chandler, 1990, p. 204).

While dialogue has not often been incorporated into research methods, there are those who see it as a promising and useful tool for clarifying positions and creating new understandings (Burbules, 1993; Freire, 1970; Guba, 1990; Green & Chandler, 1990; Lipman, 199l; Maguire, 1987). Green and Chandler (1990) see the potential of the use of dialogue, especially in areas which reflect paradigmatic shifts. They maintain that through dialogue we become able to develop strategies of implementation that "extend our current knowledge and understanding of educational phenomena, as well as ways of moving beyond the détente that currently exists within and across groups and paradigms" (p. 215). While Green and Chandler make an implicit connection between dialogue and